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RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 3798

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 001739

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/05/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: MFA ON CANCELLED DRL/IRF VISIT

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA U.S. Affairs Section Chief Ismat Faizullaev met October 4 with poloff to cover several matters. On religious freedom, Faizullaev explained that the decision to cancel the trip next week of DRL/IRF's Barbara Cates was influenced in part by the GOU's frustration with not having yet received a promised draft letter on next steps from Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom Hanford. End summary.

¶2. (C) During the meeting, poloff asked for clarification on the GOU's cancellation of DRL/IRF Barbara Cates' planned October 13-17 visit. Faizullaev confirmed what the Uzbek Embassy had told Cates. He stated that Ambassador Hanford already had an opportunity to visit Uzbekistan and talk with the country's religious leaders, and reiterated that while proselytism is illegal and would continue to be punished, the government does not otherwise interfere in religious life. Officially, he could provide no further elaboration on the government's decision, noting that it had been made "at the top."

¶3. (C) Unofficially, at the end of the meeting, Faizullaev said that the government is frustrated that Hanford's promised letter has not yet materialized, and that rather than now delivering a letter, DRL/IRF is instead planning another visit to the country. Faizullaev added that he was surprised about the decision to cancel Cates' trip, and said that he was not informed about it until October 3. He left the door open to another visit by Ambassador Hanford, stating that the government would "fully consider" any such proposal.

¶4. (C) In a subsequent conversation with DCM October 4, Faizullaev stated that MFA Protocol and the Presidential Apparatus had decided to deny the visa. MFA Americas desk learned of the decision after the fact. He reiterated MFA was surprised to receive a visit request for Barbara Cates while still awaiting the draft letter from Ambassador Hanford's office.

¶5. (C) Comment: Given what we have heard from the Uzbeks in Washington and in Tashkent, we do not think that the government will change its mind about letting Cates' visit go forward. Instead, we urge the Department to finalize the draft letter on religious freedom subjects to be delivered to Deputy Foreign Minister Minavarov to start the discussion on the exchange of letters.

NORLAND